

Joining up in the Wider Atlantic

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(Translation: Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies e.V. (IASS))

Integration, the magic word of the EU, has lost its power. Yet integration continues to be a noble endeavour of all progressive forces. But how is it to be achieved? And with whom? Time is of the essence given the overheating of the planet, displacement and migration, and the threat to Western values posed by kleptocracy, illiberalism and autocracy.

New Zealand: geographically distant, culturally close

There are two dimensions to integration. Firstly, there is the creation of a common legal sphere and market in an effectively decentralised, federal EU. The next logical step would be a political area with a European identity, the community of Europeans as representatives of the association of states. But where does Europe end? CETA is strengthening neighbourly ties to Canada; New Zealand is geographically distant but culturally close; and France shares a land border with Brazil. The EU is a civilisatory project with universal values, global interests, and merely temporary borders.

Secondly, there is the integration of political areas with the aim of resolving contradictions for the sake of greater coherence, consistency and continuity – a tricky business, especially where both domestic and foreign policies need to be addressed simultaneously. Since the Maastricht Treaty, it has been the EU's task to integrate environmental concerns into the formulation and implementation of all EU policies and thus to ensure development towards sustainability. Over time, this principle has extended far beyond the confines of environmental and climate protection, and it now encompasses all policy areas.

The energy transition as a blueprint

At the same time, the traditional separation of domestic, foreign and European policies has become outdated, and in foreign policy the boundaries between portfolios and regions are increasingly blurred. Thinking locally and globally at the same time leads to an awareness of the Earth and humanity as a whole and of the planetary boundaries that must be respected if we are to achieve any kind of sustainability. New spheres of action for correcting mistakes and coordinating necessary transformations are emerging.

The energy transformation is a blueprint: it was conceived as a global project, tested at the local level, and developed in states and at national level to the point where its reach was international. Now, it has become, for economic reasons, a self-sustaining, accelerating and self-replicating success with foreign policy and security benefits. Similar transformations are required in mobility, food, resource use, urban development and other areas. And it can no longer be up to individual countries to shape them; these transformations need to be coordinated at international level, for example, under the leadership of the G20.

The same applies to the millions of 'climate refugees', people who are forced to leave their homelands. The overheating of the planet with attendant sea-level rise and desertification, the acidification of the ocean, and the loss of basic food resources all contribute to displacement

that is affecting ever larger numbers. These people have no realistic prospect of returning home, and any new policy and legal framework for displacement, trapped populations, migration, flight and asylum needs to take this into account.

Particularly now, at a time when every country needs to rethink relations with the US, the wider Atlantic is an attractive space for joining forces and coordinating policies. The four continents around the South and North Atlantic area are strikingly coherent, dominated by four or five related languages, characterised by relatively similar legal systems, and already integrated to a significant degree thanks to family ties, travel, communication, trade, and investment. Values and ideals with regard to the structure and functioning of the state, and the role and rights of citizens are similar throughout the region. And it is also relatively peaceful.

Where else could a better integration of foreign, development and security policy for sustainability and vital transformations succeed if not in the countries bound by the Atlantic?

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